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Govr's Message

House Representatives U.S.

Laid on table & 1500 Copies ordered to be printed with accompanying documents Thursday Dec 12th 1856 [illegible] Ch'f Clerk 1412

Referred to Committee respecting standing of the House Jany 6th 1857 [illegible] Ch'f Clerk

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[redacted]

Gentlemen of the Council,
and House of Representatives,

The unqualified and distinct separation of our Executive and Legislative departments is a peculiar feature of the act of Congress organizing the Government of our Territory. I have no disposition to find fault with this original principle of withholding from the Executive authority coordinate with the law-making power, but on the contrary I commend it as most wise and salutary in a system of government so imperfect and unsatisfactory as that which the people of the Territories have been constrained to submit to. This characteristic of our fundamental law, it is presumable, has been the cause of the non-observance of the custom, usual elsewhere, of an elaborate and digested expression from the Executive to the Legislative department of the government, at the commencement of each session, as to the condition and wants of the country. At least, since I have held the position I now hold, whilst I have been ready, at all times, to cooperate with the Legislative Assembly, in every legitimate way. It has always influenced me to an earnest carefulness against any act that might be construed into an improper interference of one department with the duties of another. However, the courteous action which you have been pleased to take, which has been communicated to me through your authorized delegation, would seem to invite me to the gratification I now take in exercising the privilege of thus addressing you, hastily and without the accustomed preparation.

The calamitous events which had befallen the Territory, and the serious and threatening posture of affairs, which existed at the period of the commencement of the last session of the Assembly, then occasioned the profoundest anxiety and excited the gloomiest apprehensions. All ~~our~~ energies were employed in repelling the attacks of hostile Indians — in a desperate warfare with a treacherous and faithless race, who had devastated most flourishing sections of our country — carried desolation and sorrow to the homes and firesides of our settlers, in the destruction of their fortunes and the wanton butchery of their helpless ~~helf~~ families.

It is a matter of the sincerest congratulation that the aspect of things has so much changed.

A more cheerful feeling is assuaging the anguish and suffering of the past, and the Territory is gradually recovering from the ruinous effects of a calamity so great. To the courage, gallantry and indomitable spirit of our citizen soldiery is Oregon chiefly indebted for that protection and defence which the general government did not afford. During a winter campaign they endured incredible hardships and privations. Poorly clad, and for weeks subsisting upon the flesh of their own horses, unflinchingly and courageously they maintained their posts — far out in the enemy's country at the north, and amid the snow-piled mountains in the south — with a fidelity worthy of the highest encomiums. A resolution of thanks, in the name of the Territory, is due them for their meritorious and arduous services.

The memory of those who perished in the cause of their country, during the war, may be preserved in the pages of its history, but it would seem proper by the erection of a monumental column, at the seat of government, or by some other appropriate mode, to testify the public appreciation of the services, and to perpetuate the memory of the honored dead. They were true to Oregon.

The inactive and imbecile policy pursued by the Officer commanding the U.S. troops upon the Pacific coast, at a very critical juncture, and his more reprehensible conduct in the vindictive efforts he has made, through the press, and by his letters and reports at Washington, to asperse and malign the people of the Territory, may have had a tendency to prejudice them against the army.

This valuable arm of the public service, which is designed for the protection of the country, and to assure the lives and property of those who deem it a duty to support it, has always enjoyed a high reputation for efficiency and gallantry, and I have no doubt, under the command of other than superannuated officers will continue to maintain its brilliant character. I have heretofore acknowledged its valuable aid, before its operations were controlled by a commanding officer whose head quarters were in an adjoining State, remote from the theatre of war. Oppressed by the deepest anxiety, on account of the grave accusations, so unwarrantably made, against the people of the Territory, in which I was charged with the grossest violation of rights, I deemed it my duty to visit the seat of our national government, and confuting those accusations and charges, to know wherein we did wrong in defending ourselves from Indian aggression and barbarity.

It is enough for me to say, that in the great capitol of the nation I found no accusation that could be sustained, no one of respectability and influence to do us injury. While abroad I found the name of Oregon a name commanding respect, and receiving distinguished consideration. The great and worthy of the land appreciate and hold in high estimation, the brave industrious and enterprising character of her people. The delegate of the Territory was at his post, faithful and watchful; and it affords me pleasure to be able to bear personal testimony of his worth, ability and efficiency. His unflagging zeal, and indefatigable industry, procured us Congressional legislation in reference to the expenses of the war, when there seemed no hope of such a consummation. That legislation gave authority to the Secretary of War to appoint three commissioners to adjust those expenses, which duty he has performed.

These commissioners have met and organized, and are ready to proceed to the discharge of the trust assigned them, so soon as the Chiefs of the departments of the Territory are prepared to furnish their reports. The commission is composed of able, upright and high minded gentlemen, and is entitled to the respect and confidence of the whole community.

The Quartermaster, Commissary and Adjutant Generals, under my orders, have been, and are, assiduously engaged in making up the complete and final reports of the entire transactions of their respective departments, to be presented to the Commissioners who are to adjust the expenses of the war. I have learned, unofficially, of the passage of resolutions, by one House of the Assembly calling upon the Quartermaster and Commissary Generals for detailed reports of their operations. The great press of business that engages the unremitting attention of these two important branches of the public service will, I am apprehensive, prevent an early and full compliance with the requirements of those resolutions. I am sure it would be a matter of general regret, when so large an interest is concerned as in the present case — that of the whole Territory — should the final reports of these departments be delayed in reaching the speediest action of the Commission, upon whose adjudication the accounts of the numerous claimants will ultimately be paid,

These officers are controlled by my orders, acting under my more immediate direction and observation, in behalf of the Territory, for the United States, and while I am aware that efforts have been made, to prejudice them in public estimation, I hesitate not, to say that I believe them capable, honest and faithful, and I cannot withhold from them my confidence. I beg to assure you that I shall cause all the important information to be derived from their reports, when prepared, which it is presumed will be about the 10th of next month, to be laid before you.

While in the City of New York, I expended five hundred dollars in the purchase of books for the Territorial Library, being the amount of an appropriation made by the last Congress for such purpose. As soon as the books shall have been received, and they are expected by every steamer, I will cause them to be placed in the possession of the Territorial Librarian with a catalogue and other papers pertaining to the purchase.

The "Commissioners for the construction of a penitentiary," elected at the last session of the Assembly, failed to qualify, with one exception. The vacancies were filled ~~The vacancies were filled~~ by appointment; and I am happy to say that the Commissioners have displayed superior ability, and discharged their duties with energy and fidelity. What they have accomplished I make no doubt will be to your entire satisfaction. As the Board, in accordance with the law, does not report to the Executive, but directly to the Assembly, I respectfully refer you to that document for information, in detail, as to the progress and condition of this public work.

I have the honor to transmit, herewith, as the law requires, a statement of the condition of the fund for the erection of Capitol Buildings; Also a communication from the First Comptroller of the Treasury in reference to the decision of that office in regard to balances due for work performed, and damages claimed by contractors on that work and allowed at the session of the Assembly of 1854 and 5, Seventeen thousand dollars of the money appropriated by Congress, to complete the Capitol Building, remains still in the Treasury of the United States.

I have likewise the honor to submit, herewith, a copy of correspondence ~~between myself~~ with the Secretary of War in relation to Indian Affairs.

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At the risk of a violation of propriety I take the liberty to observe, that, in my judgment, any legislation whatever, at your present session, with a view to a re-location of the Seat of Government, under existing circumstances, as the subject is regarded, by the authorities at Washington in a light adverse to the application of the fund at any new point, would be injudicious and unproductive of any benefit to your constituents. The subject has been one that has, more or less, engaged the time and attention of every session of the Assembly. It is one too upon which there has been a great diversity of opinion, and which has already caused too much unkind and bitter feeling. It is a matter, possibly, that can be satisfactorily adjusted only by the action of a State government. In view of the probability of a speedy consummation of such a measure it would appear the part of wisdom to defer its further agitation until that event shall have transpired.

The organization of a State government for Oregon, with the experience obtained at Washington in reference to the position and treatment of Territorial interests there, I deem a subject of the first consequence, There are so many disadvantages and positive grievances entailed by the Territorial form of government, that, in the acquisition of new territory by the United States, the consideration of Congress must inevitably be given to the remodelling and improvement of the whole system. The noble principle enunciated ~~The noble principle enunciated~~ in the Kansas-Nebraska act is a step in the advance and may be regarded as an evidence of the encouragement that is in the future in this respect,

The Indian difficulties upon our frontiers have, and will, for a time, deter an increase of our population by the ordinary means of overland immigration, which has been the usual source of our principal yearly accessions, chiefly to the agricultural class of our inhabitants. Hundreds of industrious and enterprising people would have started from the States, in the ensuing spring, by the overland route, to make their homes in Oregon, but for the unprotected condition of the route, Military posts at Fort Boisé and Fort Hall are imperatively required to insure safe and unobstructed travel in the Indian Country, and as links to connect the chain of such establishments on either side of the Mountains.

An independent sovereignty will be certain to induce, by the only other means of access, a character of population, differing in interest, but quite as requisite to the permanent prosperity of the country. Capital with her keen vision, ~~Capital, with her keen vision,~~ would seek investments here. Our natural resources, as yet comparatively untouched, would be put in process of development. In the train of Capital will follow Labor. There is no section of the whole Union where the attainment of wealth is easier, or more certain, or the means of its accumulation more various, than in Oregon. Our wants are manifold. In the halls of our National Legislature a State demands and receives, while a Territory beseeches and is disappointed.

A State organization, based upon the principles
of economy — guarding against extravagant
expenses, high salaries and excessive legislation,
I am confident would be satisfactory, successful
and prosperous. It is not for me to advise
as to the manner in which you shall
submit this subject to the people, and yet
I would suggest the mode that will secure
the speediest determination as the best.

The election for President of the United States
has just transpired with more excitement
than is usually incident to this quadrennial
occurrence. For the first time in the history
of the nation the candidate of a purely sectional
party, powerful in numbers, has been sought
to be elevated to power. The consequence of
this was to have been foreseen. The whole
~~country~~ nation was convulsed, and the Union
threatened with dismemberment in the
event of the success of that party. But fortunately
for the Country the candidate of the democratic
party has been elected. This party, the party
of progress, from the triumph of its principles
in the successful achievement and application
of its measures for the public good, has
become preeminently the party of the Union

and the Constitution — the Union of the Republic.

In conclusion I assure you that it will afford me pleasure to co-operate with you, as may be desirable, in the advancement of the public good. May He who ruleth all things well have you in his holy keeping, bless your deliberations with harmony and make them promotive of the interests and welfare of the Territory.

Territory of Oregon, Executive Office,
Salem Dec 10th, 1856.

Geo. L. Curry.